

IMAGINE AUSTIN

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

DRAFT Strategic Issues Working Paper
for City Staff and Citizen's Advisory Task Force
Review and Discussion



March 2010

Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION	5
2 LAND USE AND POPULATION	9
3 HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS	13
4 ECONOMY	17
5 ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES	21
6 TRANSPORTATION	27
7 PUBLIC UTILITIES	31
8 COMMUNITY SERVICES	33
9 PARKS AND RECREATION	35
10 HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	37
11 SUSCEPTIBILITY TO CHANGE ANALYSIS	41

As described in the introduction, this draft is intended as a “work-in-progress” that summarizes the current understanding of issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan. As a starting point for discussion, it is presented in a flexible format that can be revised and added to over time to reflect input from the public, Citizens’ Advisory Task Force, city staff, etc.

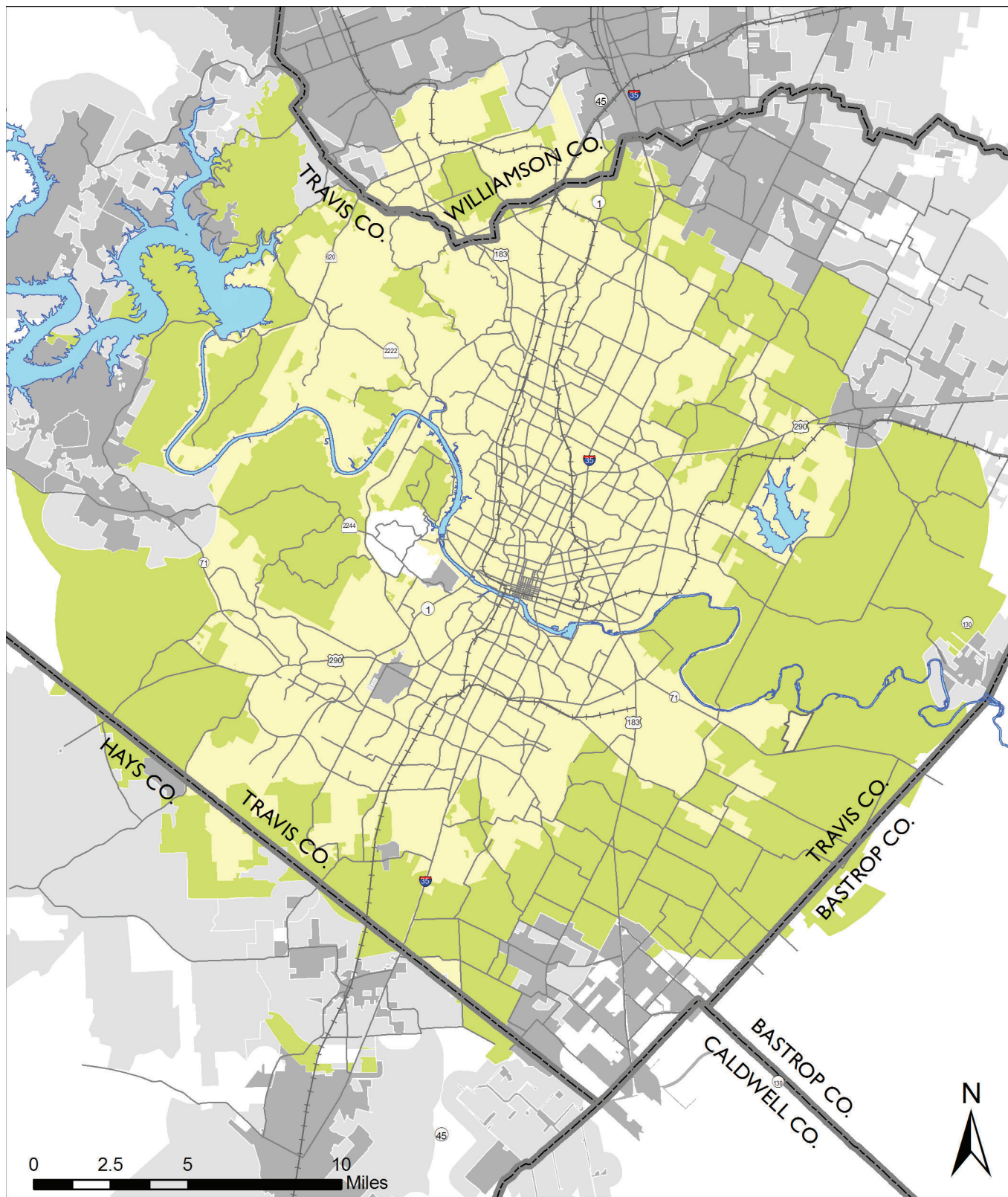
Prepared by:

Wallace, Roberts, Todd, LLC,

AngelouEconomics

Kimley Horn & Associates

Raymond Chan & Associates



City of Austin Jurisdiction and Neighboring Municipalities

- Legend**
- Austin - City Limits
 - Austin - Extra-territorial Jurisdiction
 - Other City Limits
 - Other ETJs

Figure 1. City of Austin Jurisdiction and Neighboring Municipalities

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan will establish 1) a vision for Austin's future derived from community input and 2) a "game plan" to achieve the vision through action by the City and its partners. An understanding of the conditions and trends that are shaping Austin today and its evolution in the future is necessary to provide context for the vision, policy framework, and action plan that will be developed through the planning process. The foundation for this understanding is provided by the Community Inventory, which provides data about demographic and household trends, Austin's natural environment, land use and zoning, and other topics relevant to the Comprehensive Plan. This Strategic Issues Report provides a summary of key issues for Austin's future based on a review of the Community Inventory as well as public input to date, including public meetings, surveys, stakeholder interviews, etc.

This report is intended not as a definitive product but as a "work-in-progress" that summarizes the current understanding of important issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan. As a starting point for discussion, it is presented in a flexible format that can be revised and added to over time to reflect input from the public, Citizens' Advisory Task Force, city staff, etc., including as further elements are added. [As the planning process moves from visioning to developing policies and actions, the format can be expanded to incorporate ideas \(implementation strategies, case studies from other cities, etc.\) to address each issue.](#)

Sustainability

The report organization largely mirrors the content of the Comprehensive Plan elements required by the Austin City Charter (future land use, traffic circulation and mass transit, housing, etc.). It should be noted, however, that there is much overlap between elements (e.g., land use and transportation). Sustainability has been identified by City Council as an overarching goal of the Comprehensive Plan and thus can be used help identify interrelationships and synergies between issues identified for different plan elements. The comprehensive planning process is designed, in large part, to engage the community in defining what a sustainable future for Austin means. [To help inform this process, this report characterizes the dimensions of sustainability in terms of the three "E's" – Economy, Environment, and Equity.](#) The basic tenet of this triple bottom line approach is that sustainable communities are those that address economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social equity in a mutually supportive manner. To broadly depict the interrelated dimensions of sustainability, the report identifies one or more of the three E's for each strategic issue. For example, land use issues are wide-ranging in nature and thus touch on all three dimensions of sustainability, while issues identified for Environmental Resources primarily impact environmental quality.

Locally, the University of Texas Environmental Science Institute defines the foundation of sustainability using the often cited Brundtland Commission definition: *the ability to provide for the needs of the world's current population without damaging the ability of future generations to provide for themselves.* In addition, the University of Texas applies the triple bottom line approach to its sustainability studies programs and decision making efforts across departments.

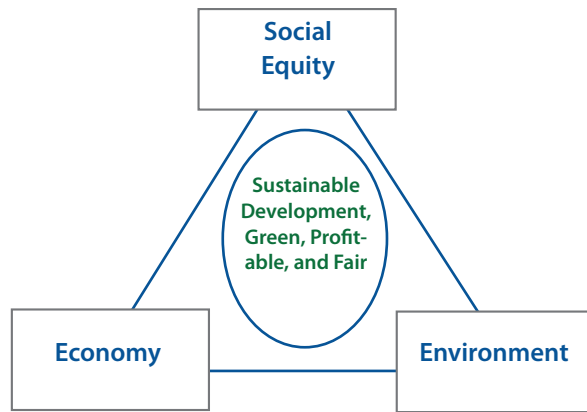


Figure 2. University of Texas Sustainability Graphic

At the October 2009 Imagine Austin Open House participants were asked to define what sustainability means for Austin and the region. While responses ranged from affordability, to reducing sprawl, to living wage jobs, the most frequently cited responses point to effective public transportation, pedestrian/bicycle friendly development, and protecting the natural environment. As the comprehensive planning process continues, Austin residents will continue to shape exactly what a sustainable future looks like Austin, using the three “E’s” as building blocks.

The “three-legged stool” is a useful concept that has been used as the foundation of a number of community plans. The following five sustainability principles (developed by WRT) is another example of a conceptual framework for sustainable community planning and may be useful as Austin develops its own definition of a sustainable future:

1. **Energy:** Reduce fossil fuel usage and carbon emissions through the planning and design of communities, sites, and buildings.
2. **Resiliency:** Reduce vulnerability to external environmental and economic threats through planning, design, and increased reliance on local resources, goods, and services.
3. **Mobility:** Locate and design transportation system components to reduce automobile dependency and promote use of alternative transportation modes.
4. **Stewardship:** Preserve and restore natural, cultural, and historic built resources. Integrate natural and human ecological systems in the planning and design of communities.
5. **Equity:** Provide housing, transportation, and employment opportunities for persons of all socioeconomic backgrounds and abilities.

Stakeholder Engagement

As referenced above, the consultants are conducting stakeholder interviews to gain a broad range of input in defining strategic issues. A list of organizations and departments interviewed thus far is summarized below. In addition to interviews, Austin City departments were invited to provide their thoughts on strategic issues from the perspective of each department.

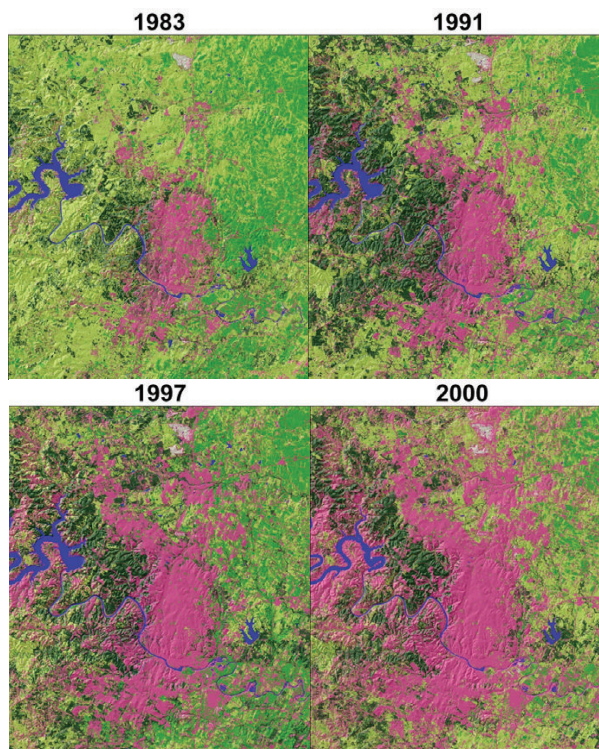
Imagine Austin Stakeholder Interviews Conducted to Date (October 2009 – February 2010)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Austin Economic Forecast Event and Survey (January 2010) • Asian American Cultural Center • Austin Board of Realtors (ABoR) • Austin Chamber of Commerce (<i>economic development, business retention, government relations, and transportation representatives</i>) • Austin City Council & Plan Commission Members • Austin Community College (ACC) • Austin Convention and Visitor's Bureau (ACVB) • Austin Electric (AE) • Austin Independent Business Alliance (AIBA) • Austin Independent School District (AISD) • Austin Neighborhood Council • Austin Water Utility (AWU), City of Austin • Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG) • Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) • Capital Metro Transportation Authority (CapMetro) • Concordia University | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown Austin Alliance • Del Valle Independent School District (DVISD) • Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office (EGRSO), City of Austin • Hill Country Conservancy • Immigrant Services Network (ISN) • Leadership Austin • Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) • Meals on Wheels and More • Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Office (NHCD), City of Austin • Real Estate Council of Austin (RECA) • St David's Community Health Foundation • Texas Nature Conservancy • Travis County Health and Human Services • Urban Coalition • UT Sustainability Center • Watershed Protection and Development Review (WP-DRD), City of Austin • Watershed Protection District (WPD), City of Austin |
|---|---|

LAND USE AND POPULATION

Land Use Issue #1: The growth dynamic in Austin and the surrounding region has been characterized by population growth, land consumption, and outward expansion.

- Much of the growth of Austin and the larger region has been lower density development outside of established centers, resulting in separation of uses, greater travel times and associated traffic congestion, consumption of open space, and other impacts.
- While still the largest jurisdiction in the MSA, Austin's share of regional population and employment is decreasing. Austin currently comprises nearly 50% of the MSA's population but that figure is projected to decline to one-third by 2040 (source: U.S. Census and City of Austin).¹



Source: U.S. Geological Survey

Figure 3. Recent Land Consumption, 1983-2000, Source: Austin Community Inventory, U.S. Geological Survey

*Economy,
Environment,
Equity*

LAND USE/POPULATION INDICATORS AND TRENDS

- Before 2000, Austin's population grew at an annual rate of about 3.5% per year (close to doubling every 20 years). The recent annual growth rate has slowed to about 1.6%.
- Between 2000 and 2008, Austin's population grew at a rate of 13%, which was less than Travis County (17%), the Austin- Round Rock Metropolitan Statistical Area¹ (MSA) (24%), and Texas (14%), but greater than the national average (7%).
- About 46% of rangeland in the Austin-Round Rock MSA was converted to urban uses between 1983 and 2000.
- Austin's population is projected to grow at an annual rate of about 1.5% - 2% over the next 30 years, compared to about 3.5% per year projected in the Austin-Round Rock MSA as a whole.
- About 18% (73,000 Acres) of the ETJ are undeveloped without environmental constraints. However, this land is seeing increased development pressure.

¹ The Austin-Round Rock MSA includes Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson Counties.

¹ This projection does not account for any future annexations by the City, meaning that Austin's population may actually grow at a faster rate.

Land Use Issue #2: While the general direction of growth has been outward expansion, there is considerable potential for redevelopment and infill development within Austin.

- Sources such as demolition permit records and analysis of improvement to land ratio² indicate that there has been a significant amount of redevelopment in Austin and that redevelopment is likely to continue in the future.
- Commercial corridors such as Lamar Boulevard, Burnet Road and Airport Boulevard are examples of locations with potential for infill and redevelopment of older retail uses.

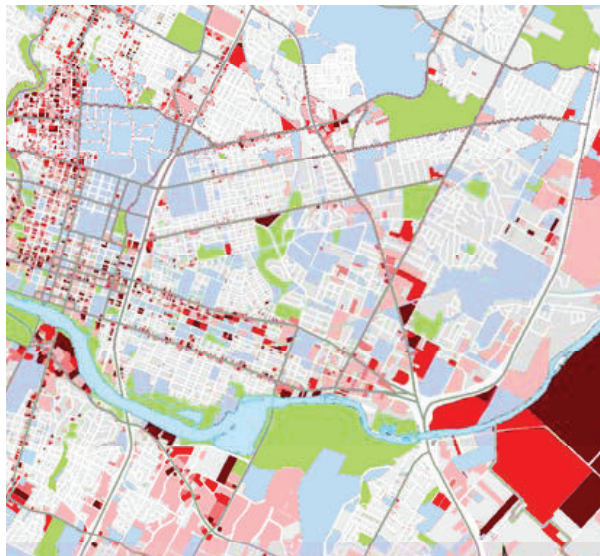


Figure 5. Example of Improvement to Land Ratio (ILR), Commercial and Multi-Family Parcels (See Community Inventory for more detail). Based on analysis, parcels with an ILR of less than 1.0 (shown in dark red) are more likely to redevelop.

*Economy,
Environment*

² Improvement to land ratio is the appraised value of the improvements on a parcel divided by the value of the land. The theory is that property owners will seek to maximize the value of their investment when the value of the improvement is less than the value of the land.

³ The ETJ covers the unincorporated area within five miles of the present city boundary.

Land Use Issue #3: Population growth and land use within Austin affects the larger region and vice versa, underscoring the need for coordinated planning.

- In the past Austin's land area experienced major growth through annexation (from 30.9 square miles in 1940 to over 300 square miles in 2009). The area beyond the city boundary within which Austin can maintain some control, including the potential for annexation, is referred to as its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) and is part of the study area for the comprehensive plan.³ In recent decades, state legislation, the creation of Municipal Utility Districts, and the presence of other growing municipalities limit the potential for future annexation, particularly to the north.
- Jurisdictional limitations on annexation are less pronounced to the east and south of Austin's current city boundary. This area of Austin and its ETJ has a relatively high proportion of undeveloped land with minimal environmental constraints and has been designated as Austin's "Desired Development Zone" by City Council. However, development in Round Rock / Williamson County is shifting the momentum of growth north away from Austin and GIS analysis indicates that this trend may continue in the future (*see Susceptibility to Change section*).
- Two regional transportation initiatives highlight how planning for Austin and the region as a whole are inextricably linked (*see Transportation section*):
 - » The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's (CAMPO) People, Planning and Preparing for the Future: Your 25 Year Transportation Plan, scheduled for release in June 2010; and
 - » Capital Metro Transit's All Systems Go Plan.

*Economy,
Environment,
Equity*

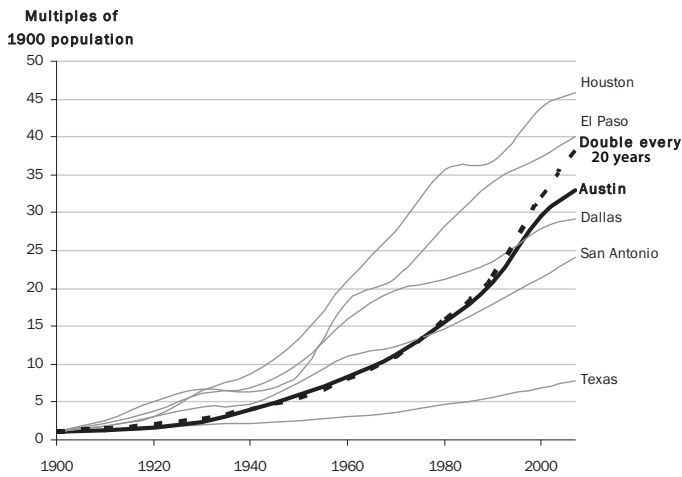


Figure 6. Population for Austin, Texas, and other large Texas cities (1900-2000), Source: U.S. Census, Austin Community Inventory.

Land Use Issue #4: A complex set of plans, policies, and regulations impact land use and development in Austin.

- The City has an active neighborhood planning program. A number of neighborhoods have completed or are in the process of developing plans and future land use maps intended to guide zoning changes to implement the plan. However, many others lack neighborhood plans and future land use maps (see *Housing and Neighborhoods Issue #4*).
- Austin has numerous zoning designations ranging from single use districts (residential, commercial, industrial) to special purpose base districts to overlay/combining districts. Zoning is not necessarily a good predictor of future land use because rezonings are common, particularly in areas without an adopted neighborhood plan and future land use map.
- A number of past and current planning initiatives have influenced and will continue to influence land use patterns in Austin. For example, the Barton Springs Watershed regulations enacted pursuant to the 1992 Save Our Springs initiative resulted in reduced density but did not prevent development within the Drinking Water Protection Zone (see *Environmental Issue #1*). Examples of more recent planning initiatives include the Robert Mueller Municipal Airport Redevelopment (2000), the Corridor Planning Program (2001), the University Neighborhood Overlay (2004), Transit-Oriented Development Ordinance (2005), and Commercial Design Standards (2006).
- What is lacking is an overall framework that ties all of these plans, policies, regulations, and initiatives together in a unified direction for the future. This is a key purpose of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan.

**Economy,
Environment,
Equity**

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Housing and Neighborhoods Issue #1: Housing prices have increased significantly over the last ten years without similar increases in household income.

- Many Austin households experienced large increases in household income during the 1990s at a time when Austin housing prices were considered relatively affordable. However, over the last ten years housing costs have risen by 85%, while household incomes have remained stagnant or declined. The declining median family income trend is most prevalent in Hispanic and African-American households, compared with the overall population.⁴ As the percentage of homes affordable to Austin residents is declining, families are forced to look elsewhere in the region for housing. Austin has a need for more moderately priced homes (i.e., \$113,000 to \$240,000). Attached housing, which often fills this need in other cities, is limited in Austin.
- Austin residents have consistently supported creating and maintaining affordable housing, which is reflected in City policy. In 2006, voters approved the use of \$55 million in General Obligation Bonds to increase homeownership and rental opportunities for low-to-moderate income households. Austin's Five-Year Consolidated Plan describes priorities and funding recommendations for the City's housing and community development activities.

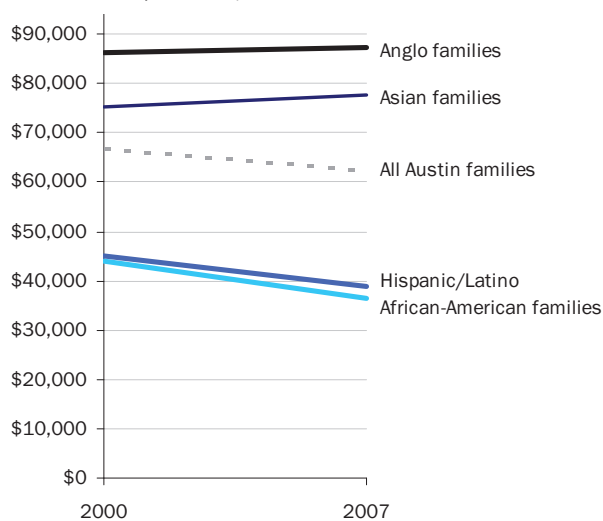


Fig 7. Median Family Income (2000-2007), 2007 dollars,
Source: Census, 2000, 2007, Austin Community Inventory.

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS INDICATORS AND TRENDS

- In 2008, median household income in Austin (\$51,004) was less than the MSA (\$57,973), but slightly higher than Texas (\$49,078). Per capita income in Austin (\$30,429) was higher than in the MSA, Texas, and the U.S. in 2008.
- Between 1998 and 2008, the median single-family home price increased by 90% from \$129,900 to \$240,000. The percentage of all single family homes considered affordable (to households earning 80% of the median family income as defined by HUD), declined to 28% from 42% in 1998.
- Austin is a majority renter city (54%) and has a need for affordable housing rentals (e.g., there is a shortage of rental units for households with incomes less than \$20,000).
- Austin's Hispanic/Latino and Asian populations are growing. According to the Census, 6% of Austin's population is Asian, which is a higher percentage than the region, state, or nation. The largest number increase occurred in the Hispanic population, which grew from 106,148 in 1990 to 260,535 in 2007. Austin's Hispanic population (35%) is slightly less than in Texas (36%), but higher than the MSA (30%) and the nation (15%).



⁴ From 2000-2007 in 2007 dollars. Source: Austin Community Inventory, 2000 Census, 2009 American Community Survey.

Housing and Neighborhood Issue #2: Austin's Hispanic/Latino and Asian communities have grown significantly since 1990; however, their growth has not been evenly distributed throughout the City.

- Since 1990, the racial/ethnic makeup of Austin's population has shifted. Around 2005, the City's Anglo population (non-Hispanic white) decreased to 49% of the total population, while the Hispanic population grew to 35%. Austin's African-American population grew in absolute numbers, but its percentage decreased from 12% to 8%. Austin's Asian community grew (both in numbers and in percentage) and increased in diversity. According to the 2007 Census, 6% of Austin's residents were Asian.
- While the Hispanic/Latino is growing, lower-income Hispanic households are becoming increasingly concentrated in three areas: lower east Austin, greater Dove Springs, and St. John.



Housing and Neighborhood Issue #3: In terms of age, Austin is a relatively young city; however, since 1990, the percentage of the population in the 20-34 age groups has decreased, while the percentage in the 45-64 age groups has increased.

- In 2008, the largest segment of Austin's population (21%) fell into the 25-34 age range. The median age in Austin was 31.4, compared to 33.2 for the state of Texas, and 36.7 for the United States.
- While there hasn't been a major shift in the distribution of age groups in Austin, the growing percentage of residents in the 45-64 year old groups may lead to a shift in housing type need (e.g., higher-priced homes) and need for health and other social services in the future.

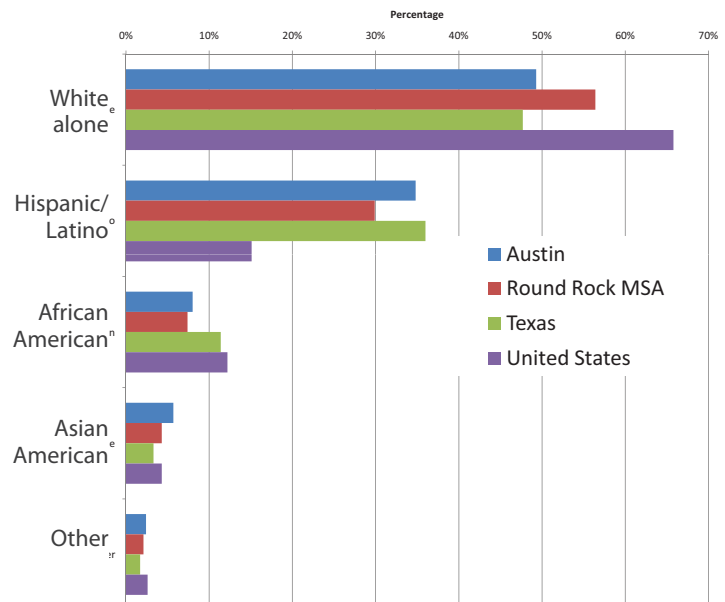


Figure 8. Population by Racial/Ethnic Composition, Source: Census, 2000-2007.

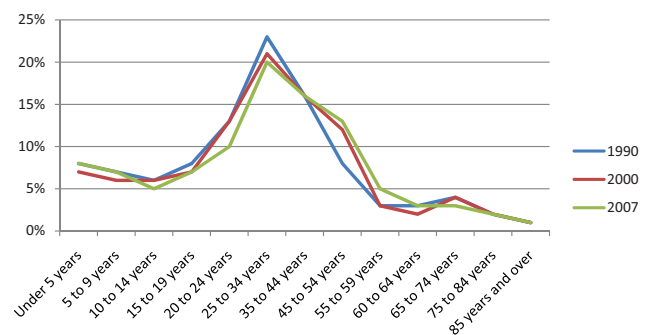


Figure 9. Age Groups (1990-2007), Source: Census.

Housing and Neighborhood Issue #4:

Austin is a city of strong neighborhoods that contribute greatly to community character and quality of life. Maintaining the character of these neighborhoods is a key concern of residents.

- Austin's older neighborhoods, particularly those built before World War II, are characterized by their walkability, compact character (typically smaller houses and lots), architecture, and sense of place.
- Neighborhoods developed since the 1950s have been more suburban in character as Austin expanded outwards from its central core.
- The City has an active neighborhood planning program and a number of neighborhoods (Brentwood/Highland, Central East Austin, North Burnet/Gateway, and South Congress, to name a few) have adopted neighborhood plans. While the issues addressed by these plans vary by neighborhood, examples of common goals include protecting existing neighborhood character; preventing encroachment from adjacent commercial corridors; maintaining safe, pedestrian-friendly streets while limiting cut-through traffic; protecting natural resources and providing parks and open spaces; and maintaining affordability and accessibility.

***Economy,
Environment,
Equity***